

CHAPTER ONE

THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

1. The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) at Work

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), in the Department of Defense, is responsible for administering the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* on behalf of the Secretary of Defense who is the Presidential designee for the Federal functions of the law.

Specifically, the mission of the FVAP is to:

- inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote,
- foster voting participation,
- protect the integrity of, and enhance, the electoral process at the Federal, state and local levels.

In carrying out the responsibilities of the *UOCAVA*, the FVAP provides information and materials to these citizens to help ensure their enfranchisement and promote understanding and participation in the democratic process. Program activities range from the development of the universal Federal Post Card Application (FPCA or SF 76) which is accepted by all 55 U.S. states and territories and serves as a simultaneous application for voter registration and/or an absentee ballot; to the production and worldwide distribution of print, broadcast and electronic voter education and information services; to developing and maintaining a working relationship with U.S. states and territories and other Federal government agencies to simplify the registration and absentee voting process.

2. Helping U.S. Citizens to Vote

The Federal government has assisted certain absentee voters since 1942. The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* requires that the states and territories allow certain groups of citizens to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal offices. In addition, many states and territories have developed their own laws allowing citizens covered by the *UOCAVA* to register and vote absentee in state and local elections as well.

U.S. citizens covered by the *UOCAVA* include:

- Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services (on active duty) and merchant marine
- Their family members
- U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S.

Further details on the *UOCAVA* are in Chapter 2 and the complete text of the *Act* is located in *Appendix D*. The *UOCAVA* covers over six million potential voters worldwide.

3. Electronic Assistance from the FVAP

The Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) website at www.fvap.ncr.gov provides voting related information and resources for *UOCAVA* citizens. In order to maximize the use of the Internet, the FVAP's main objective is to provide as much current information on-line as possible to help increase the knowledge of our citizens so that they may be able to participate in the democratic process.

The website also provides most of the FVAP's informational materials in electronic format to include this *Voting Assistance Guide*, current and back-issues of the Voting Information News newsletter and voting news releases as well as links to Federal government agencies and Congress, various U.S. citizens organizations overseas, Secretaries of State/



Directors of Elections, state and local government organizations and other pertinent sites containing election information.

Furthermore, e-mail access to the FVAP is provided directly through vote@fvap.ncr.gov.

The World Wide Web and the Internet are the most effective and efficient ways to disseminate information as they allow citizens to be supported on a real-time basis regardless of where they are located geographically.

4. The Important Role of the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO)

The *UOCAVA* requires each Federal department and agency with personnel covered by the *Act* to have a voting assistance program. Department of Defense Directive 1000.4 and the Secretary of Defense's biennial Voting Action Plan establish policy and guidelines for carrying out an effective voting assistance program.

Critical to the success of these programs are the Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs). These individuals, military and civilian, are responsible for providing accurate nonpartisan voting information and assistance to all of the citizens that they are appointed to help. They aid in ensuring that citizens understand their voting rights and how to vote absentee under the *UOCAVA*.

The U.S. Military has an extensive chain-of-command support mechanism for its VAOs. In addition, the Department of State offers voting assistance through its Embassy and Consulate VAOs to all U.S. citizens outside the United States. At the same time, many U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the United States designate and support VAOs to assist their members, employees and other U.S. citizens abroad.

5. The Voting Assistance Guide: The Principal Source for Voting Information

This *Voting Assistance Guide* is the primary source of information in carrying out a successful voting assistance program and is designed for use by both military and civilian VAOs. The *Guide* contains complete information to assist *UOCAVA* citizens in their effort to register and vote absentee. For ease of use, these instructions and guidelines are organized alphabetically by state and territory in Chapter 3.



6. The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

The FPCA is a postage-free (within U.S. postal system) postcard for use by absentee voters covered under the *UOCAVA*. The *Act* requires the design of a single postcard form to serve all states and territories as a simultaneous absentee voter registration application and an absentee ballot application. Chapter 2 contains general instructions for completing the FPCA. The extent and manner of its use, however, is controlled by state and territorial law and sometimes by local procedure. Because of varying state procedures, the citizen should refer to the specific instructions for each state and territory in Chapter 3 to determine how to complete and submit the FPCA carefully and accurately to the proper election official.

An on-line Federal Post Card Application (OFPCA) form is also available on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.ncr.gov**. See Chapter 2 for details.

It is important to note that VAOs should order and stock four FPCAs for each citizen for whom they are responsible, including family members. In addition, in-hand delivery of the FPCAs should be made no later than August 15th for citizens outside the U.S. and September 15th for citizens within the U.S.

7. The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) is a backup ballot available if a citizen outside the United States (including APO/FPO addresses) does not receive the regular absentee ballot from the state after having made a timely application for the ballot. The FWAB is generally used to vote for Federal offices (President/Vice President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Delegate or Resident Commissioner). Some states now allow military and overseas citizens to use the FWAB in elections other than general elections or for offices other than Federal offices. Again, the citizen should consult Chapter 3 of the *Guide* for specific state or territorial requirements. Connecticut is not required to, but currently does, accept the FWAB.

The FWAB is valid only when all criteria for its use have been met. Chapter 2 contains specific criteria for use of the FWAB. Also, a sample FWAB, with instructions, can be found on pages 21-24 of this *Guide*.

VAOs should order and stock at least one FWAB for each citizen for whom they are responsible.

8. Ten Major Resources To Help the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO)

As a civilian or military VAO, there are 10 major resources available to help carry out an effective, nonpartisan voter registration and absentee ballot awareness program. These 10 resources can truly enable you to perform your role at a peak level. They are:

1. FVAP Website - www.fvap.ncr.gov

The FVAP website contains all of the FVAP's informational materials, the on-line FPCA, and links to state election sites, federal government sites and overseas U.S. citizen organizations.

2. Ombudsman Service

The Ombudsman Service puts VAOs, citizens and local election officials directly in touch with the FVAP. Call toll-free in the U.S. at:

1-800-438-VOTE (8683), DSN (military) 425-1584 or Commercial (703) 588-1584. International toll-free phone numbers are listed on the inside back page of the *Guide* and on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.ncr.gov**. You can also send e-mail to **vote@fvap.ncr.gov** or fax on **(703) 588-0108**.

3. Electronic Transmission Service (ETS)

The Electronic Transmission Service faxes election materials (FPCAs, blank ballots, voted ballots,

other election materials), where allowed by state law, between the local election official and the absentee voter when conditions do not allow for timely receipt and return of these materials via the postal system. Because procedures vary from state-to-state, consult the state pages in Chapter 3 and *Appendix C* for details.

If electronic transmission is allowed by your state or territory, the FVAP recommends faxing using one of the following numbers: (703) 693-5527; DSN (military) 223-5527 or 1-800-368-8683. If a citizen experiences technical problems when faxing the FPCA or ballot, overseas citizens may contact the FVAP on the international toll-free numbers listed on the inside back cover and the FVAP website at www.fvap.ncr.gov. In the U.S., call 1-800-966-8683 for technical assistance.

After faxing, most states request that the citizen mail the completed FPCA or voted ballot to the local election official.

4. DoD Voting Information Center (VIC)

The VIC is an automated telephone system which contains election information. The system is maintained and operated by the FVAP, and allows citizens to connect directly to the office of their U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, State Governor and State Chief Election Official. Additionally, approximately 30 days prior to an election, the FVAP invites all candidates for the offices of U.S. President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative and State Governor to leave campaign messages for *UOCAVA* citizens.

The VIC also serves as a means for military VAOs to communicate with their Service Voting Action Officer, and civilian VAOs to communicate with the Service Voting Action Officer at the Department of State. The Center has speech recognition technology for callers using a rotary telephone. The VIC can be reached toll-free in the U.S. at **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, **DSN (military) 425-1343**, **commercial (703) 588-1343** or by using the international toll-free numbers listed on the inside back cover and on the FVAP website at www.fvap.ncr.gov.



5. Voting News Releases

These are periodic news releases which contain important, time-sensitive information that may

affect *UOCAVA* citizens. For example, if a state or territory makes a change to its procedures or election dates during the year, or a special election for a Federal office is called, a news release would be issued to alert citizens of these changes.

The voting news releases are sent directly via e-mail to VAOs. Releases are also available on the FVAP website at www.fvap.ncr.gov.

6. Voting Information News Newsletter

This is a monthly newsletter published by the FVAP which contains timely information on elections, a “To Do” list for VAOs, and other voting related matters that may affect *UOCAVA* citizens. The newsletter is sent primarily to all civilian and military VAOs by e-mail or regular mail. It is also available on the FVAP website at www.fvap.ncr.gov.

7. Training

A training workshop presentation is available for VAOs at the FVAP’s website at www.fvap.ncr.gov. There are two versions of the workshop. One focuses on the duties and responsibilities of VAOs in the Uniformed Services, while the other version is for VAOs at Embassies and Consulates as well as U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the United States. The training highlights instructions for completing the forms, responsibilities of the VAO and the resources available to conduct a successful voting assistance program.

8. Election Calendar Poster and Motivational Posters

The Election Dates poster lists the dates for Federal office and state primaries, runoff elections and the general election. Best of all, this poster has a place at the bottom for the VAO’s name, telephone number and email address. VAOs should display the poster so individuals will know how to contact them.

To help promote voter awareness, the FVAP also provides motivational posters. These are posters that contain an inspirational theme used to promote interest in voting.

Military VAOs receive the posters through their normal distribution channels. Overseas citizens can pick-up the posters from Embassy and Consulate VAOs as well as order them directly from the FVAP.

9. Get Out the Vote Campaign.

Produced by the FVAP, in cooperation with the Advertising Council, this campaign consists of motivational public service announcements encouraging citizens to vote. These are available in print, audio and video formats for use by local media worldwide. Call the FVAP for details.

10. Embassy and Consulate VAOs (Civilian) or Chain of Command Support (Military)

As a military VAO, make certain your Installation telephone operator has your name and telephone number and that you know the names and telephone numbers of VAOs in your chain of command. A complete list of Service Voting Action Officers can be found on page 1 of this *Guide*.

As a civilian Voting Assistance Officer (VAO), know the names and telephone numbers of voting officers at your closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Discuss your voting efforts with Embassy and Consulate VAOs and work together to develop an effective voting assistance program for all U.S. citizens in your community.

9. How to Contact the FVAP

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) can be reached at:

Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program
Department of Defense
Washington Headquarters Services
1155 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1155

World Wide Web: www.fvap.ncr.gov

E-mail: vote@fvap.ncr.gov

U.S. Toll-free: 1-800-438-VOTE (8683)

International toll-free numbers are listed on the inside back cover of this *Guide* and the FVAP website at www.fvap.ncr.gov.

Commercial: (703)-588-1584

DSN (military): 425-1584

Fax: (703) 588-0108

DSN (military) Fax: 425-0108

